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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002428

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STATE FOR EAP, PM, AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO AND J5
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (TOOLAN/REDMON)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: AFP NEXT STEPS IN BASILAN AND JOLO OPERATIONS

REF: A. MANILA 2369
[B](#). MANILA 2358
[C](#). MANILA 2344

Classified By: (U) Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY. The senior leadership of Armed Forces of the Philippines' Western Mindanao Command plans a measured response to the July 10 Moro Islamic Liberation Front ambush that killed 14 Philippine Marines on Basilan. They are at the same time concerned by the concentration of senior Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists in the vicinity of Moro National Liberation Front forces in the Indanan region of western Jolo and are considering an amphibious landing to disrupt the terrorists' operations. Incoming Jolo Governor Sakur Tan has reportedly created a favorable impression with an emphasis on civil military operations and economic development. END SUMMARY.

BRINGING THE PERPETRATORS
OF THE BASILAN ATTACK TO JUSTICE ...

[2](#). (C) During the Ambassador's July 16 visit to Zamboanga City she visited the Philippine Marines wounded in the bloody July 10 encounter with elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and separately discussed the incident with the senior leadership of AFP's Western Mindanao Command (WESTMINCOM). Lieutenant General Cedo, deputy commander Brigadier General Sabban and naval forces commander Rear Admiral Marayag insisted that the AFP's response to the death of 14 Marines in the July 10 clash would be "measured and disciplined." LTG Cedo said his intent was to go after specific targets, not to conduct a large-scale offensive, despite pressure from Malacanang and a public clamor for revenge.

... WHILE KEEPING
THE PEACE PROCESS ON TRACK

[3](#). (C) Notwithstanding President Arroyo's "fury" about the incident, Cedo said he wanted to keep the peace process on track and not provoke a tit-for-tat cycle of violence with the MILF. Cedo observed that the MILF Central Committee did not exercise effective control over its subordinate commands. "They can't give us a roster of their members on Basilan, or even the number of their forces," he stated. While Cedo expressed confidence that the Basilan ambush would not derail the peace process, he conceded that the next few days would

be critical. (According to press reports, Cedo has given the MILF a one-week deadline beginning August 15 to surrender the perpetrators of the attack and mutilation of the dead Marines' bodies.)

MORTAR DUDS SYMPTOMATIC
OF SYSTEMATIC LOGISTIC PROBLEMS

14. (C) LTG Cedo admitted that the AFP had a systematic problem with ammunition reliability due to improper storage and rotation. The lot of mortar ammunition that the Basilan Marines had used dated from the early 1980's and had a 50-percent dud rate. A furious Cedo said, "Our procurement system is broken and doesn't work; I tell Manila I need something immediately and I'll get it in two years." (JUSMAG is working with its AFP counterparts to help them address the ammunition storage issue.)

CAN'T ALLOW ASG AND JI TO REGROUP AND REFIT

15. (C) Turning to operations on Jolo, LTG Cedo and BG Sabban both expressed concern that Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) bombers Dulmatin and Umar Patek, as well as other high-value terrorists, appeared to have found shelter in the vicinity of a large Moro National Liberation Front force in the Indanan region of western Jolo. (WESTMINCOM intelligence officers separately speculated to their Joint Special Operations Task Force counterparts that the JI and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) had coalesced around Indanan to plan and train for future operations.) Cedo and Sabban agreed that the JI and ASG could not be allowed to regroup and refit, with Sabban recommending that it was time for a modified amphibious

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landing in the area, similar to the operation that launched Operation Ultimatum in August 2006.

NEW JOLO GOVERNOR
CREATES A GOOD IMPRESSION

16. (C) LTG Cedo praised incoming Jolo Governor Sakur Tan, singling out the new governor's focus on civil-military operations and desire to make the U.S.-constructed Area Coordination Centers a key element in promoting economic development. Cedo also noted that Tan had attacked the problem of absentee mayors by issuing an order that none of them could leave the island without his permission. (Governor Tan will meet with Ambassador in Manila on July 20.)

COMMENT

17. (C) Although LTG Cedo and his staff are trying to put on a brave face, they appear shaken by the July 10 attack on the Philippine Marines, which also inspired widespread public outrage and media condemnations. WESTMINCOM is nonetheless stretched thin. In addition to trying to bring the perpetrators of the Basilan ambush to justice, LTG Cedo's forces are also heavily engaged on Jolo and in trying to rescue kidnapped Italian priest Father Bossi. The commitment of the Philippine government to proceeding carefully to preserve positive elements of the peace process while seeking justice against those who violate its spirit should help to ensure a measured response that will not destroy the accomplishments on the ground in Basilan and elsewhere over the past five years, and will leave the door open for further progress.

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